

Harlech Castle

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RHYFELGYRCH GWYR HARLECH

MEN OF HARLECH

Arr. J. OWEN

Alta marcia

Doh
is Bp

1. Wu - le goel - certh wen yn fflam io, a thaf - od - au tân yn bloe - ddio,
Men of Har - lech, march to glo - ry, Vic - tor - y is hov' - ring o'er ye,

Ar i'r dew - rion ddod i dar - o un waith et - o'n un:
Bright - eyed free - dom stands be - fore ye, Hear ye not her call?

Gan fan - llef - au ty - wys - og - ion, Llais gel - yn - ion trwst arf - og - ion
At your sloth she seems to won - der, Rend the slug - gish bonds a - sun - der,

a char - lam - iad y march - og - ion Craig ar graig a gryn.
Let the war - cry's deaf -'ning thun - der ev - 'ry foe ap - pal.

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC BUILDING AND WORKS

HARLECH CASTLE

CASTELL HARLECH

AN ILLUSTRATED SOUVENIR

BY ALAN PHILLIPS M.A., OXON.

LONDON

HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

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LOCATION

The castle stands on a crag half a mile inland from Tremadoc Bay. The town is connected by railway with Barmouth, 10 miles south, and is on the coastal road A496 from that town. O.S. map no. 116: ref. SH 581312.

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Impression by John Cotman

HARLECH CASTLE

In the fifteenth century the British Isles beheld what has been finely called "the glories of decadent chivalry". The Middle Ages were moving to their vivid but stormy sunset. That was the time at Harlech Castle when everything of excitement happened. The same epoch inspired that stirring March of the Men of Harlech which has made the name familiar to countless people with only the haziest notion of where the town stands or what county it belongs to.

Even if reft of the rugged romance of those few years, Harlech Castle would still pull sightseers by its magnificent setting. A landmark itself from miles away, it offers from its battlements one of the grandest vistas in Wales across mountains and bays. On arrival it is hard to realize that the forbidding crag, when the fortress was built upon it, stood on the verge of Tremadoc Bay with a harbour at its base where a stream debouched.



The sea has receded but used to come near the foot of the crag

Since then the ocean has yielded a half-mile strip of marsh and dune where caravanners reside by the season and championships are played on the links of Royal St. Davids. To westward is the entire Llyn promontory, with Criccieth Castle plain; due north lies Snowdon, a sovereign among the clustering peaks of his peers.

So the monument has endured with the dual appeal of antiquity and landscape outlasting the stone of its vanished roofs and floors, and since 1914 it has been looked after by a Government Department—at present the Ministry of Public Building and Works—so that it is a memorial to British history. Welsh patriots remember there heroic deeds of Owen Glendower and tales of the ancestors of the Tudor line; English visitors think of Edward the First, who in organizing peace was as thorough as in winning campaigns he was bold. Not only the minstrel but also the artist has been caught by a spell, as works by Sandby and Ward, Turner and Varley, Cotman and Cox, testify.

Nobody has yet proved that this rock over 200 feet above the sea was inhabited before the thirteenth century, though from the evidence of numerous hut circles and enclosures on neighbouring hillsides, that is often assumed. Legend set down in the Mabinogion manuscript makes it the

dwelling place of Bran the Blessed and his sister Bronwen of the White Neck. Colwyn ap Tangno is a patriarch of the site. But documented history begins just after the slaying of Llewelyn the Last and capture of his brother David in the final stand for independence by Welsh princes. Harlech was one of eight castles constructed by the victorious Edward, and is exactly the same age as his biggest creations at Caernarvon and Conway.

In 1283 the English King from headquarters at Conway sent to Harlech not only an army marching along the coast, but also masons and quarrymen; next year he paid two visits to the town and granted it the rights of a borough. No permanent work of fortification is likely to have been carried out so early, but in the Pipe Roll for 1285 comes an entry of £205 17s. 1½d. as spent on making the rock-cut ditch in front of the castle at Harlech. Two summers of vigorous building followed, in the earlier of which the weekly tally of workmen averaged 868. With these accounts, as Sir Goronwy Edwards observes, "what we now see is no longer a valley full of bones; it is a field full of folk". By 1290 the structure was practically

*Edward I, the founder,
with Queen Eleanor:
sculpture at
Lincoln Cathedral*



Six

Rhuddlan
(1277-1282)



Harlech
(1283-1290)



Beaumaris
(1295-c.1330)



Edwardian Castles



Flint
(1277-c.1285)



Caernarvon
(1283-1327)

Conway
(1283-1289)





Water colour by Paul Sandby

complete, having cost between £8,000 and £9,000—getting on for a million pounds by modern reckoning. Nearly all of it is of local sandstone, hard and grey, with slate slabs interspersed. James of St. George was probably chief architect, and was certainly third in the chain of constables, holding office 1290-93. His predecessors had been Hugh Longslow and John Bevallard.

To the original plan thus rapidly fulfilled there was one important modification. The ditch being dug, the lines were laid down of inner and outer wards, and the dominant eastern front was put up with its majestic gatehouse and two angle towers; this facing landwards was by intention immensely strong, its curtain wall being about $9\frac{1}{2}$ feet thick to north of the gatehouse and $12\frac{1}{2}$ to south of it. When the time came to proceed with the remaining curtain walls of the inner ward, they were given a thickness of only 8 feet as less liable to assault; yet soon it was decided to widen them, the west wall outwardly and the other two within. Similar work to this thickening process went into the two western towers, which differ in many details from the eastern pair. This is the only point established in finding sequence for various phases of construction.

Anyway the castle soon showed itself to be a good defence proposition, for Prince Madog besieging it in 1294 was repulsed and the garrison of 37



Great seal of Owen Glendower

men quickly relieved. Scots captured in battle at Dunbar could be stowed in safe custody at Harlech. Minor repairs to the roofs of towers, evidently the last portions built, were needed in 1298. Chapel Tower was calling for renewal of lead and timber by 1321 and Prison Tower was in even worse state by 1343, when the chapel was marked "weak and ruinous". Thereafter the place slumbered and probably mouldered until around 1400, when with the rest of North Wales it was lit by the comet of Owen beginning to blaze.

Owen Glendower, begetter of more ballads and tales perhaps than any other Welshman, was then a chieftain waging guerrilla war against the lords of the Marches, who often had Henry the Fourth backing them. He was ready to attack Harlech at the end of 1401. A hundred men-at-arms and 400 archers had to be sent from Chester to deter him. Affairs became straitened for the garrison, now consisting of 40 men whose upkeep for one year cost £389 6s. 8d.; and by the winter of 1403-04, when Owen and his French allies were trying to take Caernarvon, they were in mutiny. Constable Hunt, suspected of being about to surrender to the Welsh, was imprisoned by his own men and replaced by persons referred to in a document as Sir Lewis and Fevian Colier. But pestilence weakened the party, desertion to the enemy did more, while some who tried to escape to England were killed. When Hunt and two yeomen got out of the fortress and made their way to treat with the besiegers, they were carried off to Owen. Sir Lewis, having sent to Conway for aid, by a messenger from



To William Vaughan Esq.
 Wm. Vaughan Esq. of the Shire for the County of Merioneth
 This Prospect is humbly Inscrib'd by
 his most Oblig'd Servants
 Sam. & Nath. Buck

Criccieth, held out desperately until Owen had to come in person to negotiate with the garrison. At last, overruling a minority of seven, they agreed to yield the castle on a given day for a fixed sum. It is pleasant to learn that the stubborn seven were allowed to go unpunished.

This success was the climax of Owen's career. He made Harlech his capital, lodged his family in the castle, and perhaps held at least one parliament there. It was also the pinnacle from which his fortunes slipped. In 1408-09 the great stronghold was invested and fell to a force of 1,000 men under Gilbert Talbot and his young brother John (more famous as the



THIS Castle is situated close by the Irish Sea, on a steep Rock from whence it seems to take its present Name. It was originally a strong Port of the Ancient Britains and by them called *Iwer Bannwen*, from a Lady of that Name who lived about AD. 260. It was rebuilt about the Year 877, by *Collwyn ap Iwan*, and thereupon changed its Name to *Caer Collwyn*. This Castle held out strenuously against *Edw. II.* But at length it was with much difficulty taken by *Herbert Earl of Pembroke*. This Castle held out one of the last for *R. Cha. I.* but surrendered on fair Conditions to the Parliament. Hence on 16th of March 1636. It is now in the Possession of the Crown.

Scut. & Crest. Buck del. & sculp. Published according to Act of Parliament April 3. 1742.

What S. and N. Buck saw more than 200 years ago

antagonist of St. Joan). Among the prisoners were Owen's wife, daughter, and four grandchildren; his son-in-law Mortimer was already dead from privation. Relics of this occupancy are a gilt bronze boss from the martingale of a set of horse harness bearing the arms assumed by Owen as Prince of Wales—four lions rampant quarterly counterchanged or and gules—and some stone cannon balls, one of which, 22 inches in diameter, is bigger than any British shell turned out for twentieth-century battles.

In the Wars of the Roses Harlech Castle again became notorious. Queen Margaret fled there after the capture of Henry the Sixth at Northampton in







Reconstruction by Alan Sorrell showing the probable aspect about 1300

1460; she passed on to Scotland, but Jasper Tudor, the King's half-brother, made the town his headquarters and put in charge of the castle a constable of strong Lancastrian sympathies. This was Dafydd ap Ieuan, remembered for his brag that, as he had kept a castle in France so long that all the old women in Wales talked about him, he would keep this one so long that all the old women in France would talk about him. Dafydd's ultramarine exploits, if any, found no chronicler, yet he had the distinction of being by a long way the last commander in England or Wales to haul down his flag to the Yorkists, on 14 August 1468. The investing troops were led by Lord Herbert, later Earl of Pembroke, and his brother Sir Richard Herbert. One of these chivalrous victors is said to have sent his master Edward the Fourth an ultimatum that Dafydd's life be spared; if this were not granted, Herbert would reinstate him in the castle and let the King appoint whom he pleased to get him out. Some authorities aver that the boy later to be Henry the Seventh was gathered in among the prisoners. This is the fray with which the March is traditionally associated.

By the reign of Elizabeth the First, although assizes were held at Harlech and judges accommodated in the gatehouse, the castle that had outlived its purpose was almost a total ruin—hall, chapel, kitchens decayed,



The gatehouse from the courtyard

drawbridges mere planks, and every tower roofless, Prison Tower excepted because that was still used as a gaol for debtors. We are astonished to find the place fit to stand more sieges. Sir Hugh Pennant defended it for Charles the First in the Civil War against Cromwell's brother-in-law John Jones in 1646; Colonel William Owen with fewer than 50 men did not surrender to Major-General Mytton until March 1647. That made Harlech again the last place to hold out, if we exclude the events of 1648 at Pembroke, Colchester, or Scarborough in what is sometimes termed the Second Civil War. Well may it be dubbed the castle of lost causes. A demolition order was made by Parliament, but happily for later visitors, never executed. It can scarcely have been necessary.

The castle was placed, in 1914, in the charge of what is now the Ministry of Public Building and Works. The post of constable has been retained, and for the greater part of this century has been held by the Lord Lieutenant of Merionethshire, at present Colonel J. F. Williams-Wynne.

Let us now make for the turnstile on Castle Green. In the Middle Ages this would have been the site of a barbican, or small outer defence, immediately on the town side of the moat protecting the east and south faces—the other sides being adequately guarded by nature. Until recently a causeway ran across the moat, replacing the original stone structure. A timber bridge supersedes it. We now enter the castle proper by a stair to the outer gate, its arch flanked by corbelled half-round turrets, and pass through the narrow outer ward to the object that has riveted our gaze—a huge gatehouse, 80 feet broad by 54 feet deep.

None of the other Edwardian castles possesses one single exhibit so overwhelming as this gatehouse at Harlech. It shouts a proclamation that the age of the Normans is over; never again will the donjon or keep, once the chief point for both domestic and military purposes, be tucked away among the complex of buildings. The strongest feature becomes the most obvious. In this revolution Harlech is to be bracketed with the later Beaumaris; they are utterly unlike Caernarvon, whose Eagle Tower is virtually a self-contained keep, or Conway, which lacks a gatehouse altogether.

There were indeed elaborate arrangements for cutting Harlech gatehouse



Landscape by John Varley

off from the rest of the inner ward, in the last extremity of defence. But broadly it was designed to be a residence for the constable, and, as usual with medieval abodes of the type, had guardrooms, offices and stores in the basements, with living apartments on the three upper storeys. A central passage led from the outer gate to the inner ward. The start of the vaulting that formed the ceiling of this passage may still be seen; but the existing pointed arches do not belong to it, having been inserted recently at a rather lower level. Vaulting in this castle is not frequent. Subdividing the passage, we find there was an outer section furnished with a pair of portcullises (a third was intended) which in their normal raised position came up to the floor of the chapel above, and with folding doors that opened outwards to close its eastern end; and an inner section with another portcullis (later abolished), and doors at each end. Grooves and holes made by drawbars can be detected. Seven sets of machicolations, or "murder holes", would allow the inmates to rain missiles from the first floor on anyone trying to penetrate the passage, or pour water on fires the attackers started.

Principal rooms in this edifice faced the inner ward and in consequence of safety could be given traceried windows to light them clearly. More

vulnerable, those on the east were dimmed by narrow square-headed windows with ponderous iron bars. Nearly all chambers had hooded fireplaces that should have made them cosy. Access to the upper floors was gained by stair turrets of 143 steps in two corners—each now topped by a flagstaff—until in the sixteenth century a “stately stayre” was added externally on the west to reach the hall; what now appears of this is mostly a rebuilding. On the east side of the first floor, over the entry, was a barrel-vaulted chapel, containing a lancet window, a stone basis, and, to strike a profane note, the mechanism for raising portcullises. Above this was another chapel, similar in shape but with a flat beamed ceiling. The gatehouse chimneys were grouped in two stacks, each of four circular stone shafts; remains of the southern group are still conspicuous. Roofs were almost flat and covered with lead. Wall-tops, not only on the gatehouse but generally throughout the castle, were embattled. As an attraction to students, there is in the passage a sketch imaginatively reconstructing the aspect that might have been presented about 1300 by the whole array of sturdy towers and slender turrets.

The inner ward, in shape a trapezium, measures nearly 200 feet at its greatest width along the east curtain wall. Much of it is taken up by broken walls and foundations of domestic buildings. To the right, against the north curtain, lay the bakehouse, also the general chapel of the garrison as distinct from the constable’s private place of prayer; this had a lean-to roof with arched ceiling of wood and plaster. Between these buildings a passage led to a postern into the outer ward. Foundations of an oven survive in the front wall of the bakehouse. The castle well is in an odd situation, partly built into the thickness of the north wall; it is considered that the presence of water at such a spot may be due to easy percolation of rainfall through the heavily jointed rock.

Against the west curtain were the great hall, buttery, pantry, and kitchens. The hall, modelled on that of an ordinary dwelling house, no doubt was where the men congregated at meals and leisure. It is 60 feet long by 27 feet wide, and on the seaward side had four windows with seats in them and a fireplace. There was a screen passage at the south end, beyond which lay



View from north-west showing steps to the castle from the former water gate

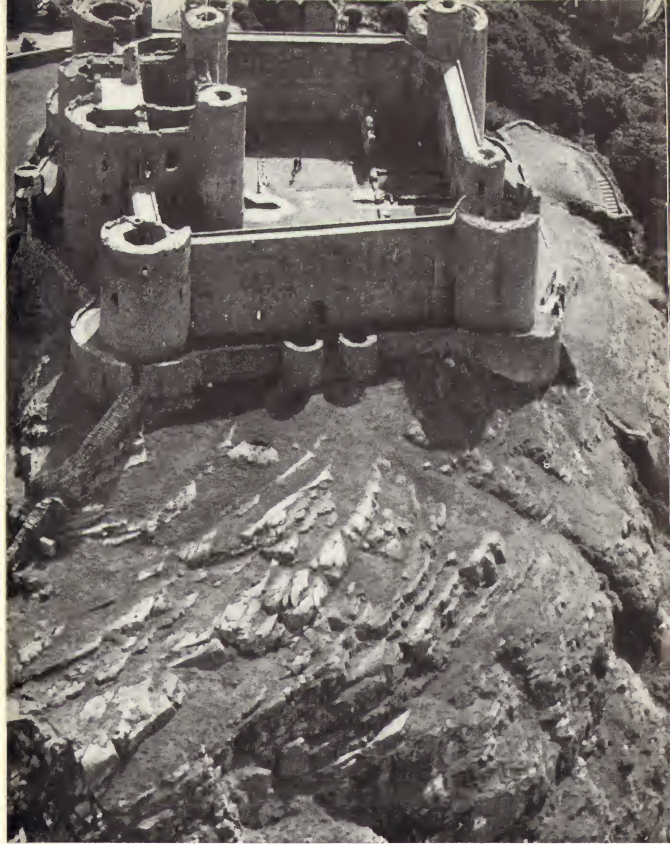


*Wall walk towards
Weathercock Tower*

the other quarters named. In the kitchen are said to be signs that a wide bench once stood there, and of a sink connecting with a drain. A pentise, or covered walk, in early days ran along the courtyard front of all these buildings, but later was blocked by an external staircase to the first floor.

Adjacent to the kitchen on the south curtain after about 1308 stood a structure known as Ystumgwern Hall because it had been brought bodily from the residence of the dead prince Llewelyn at Ystumgwern four miles away. Its dimensions suggest that the owner had kept some state there. It was evidently of timber and its framing and roof trusses seem to have been used afresh without alteration, though new windows and louveres were added, besides a buttery and pantry. Corbels placed to uphold the roof are visible. This side of the ward also had a granary with a cellar underneath where are preserved fragments of walls dividing the premises for storage.

Of course no exploration of an ancient castle can be deemed thorough without a walk on the walls. At Harlech that is the only way to appreciate the disposition of domestic quarters; moreover there are glorious views, while an atmosphere of eeriness is enhanced by the raucous chatter of jackdaws in towers. The smoothest way to go round is clockwise, entering



From the north the stronghold must have been impregnable



Landscape by John Varley

by Garden, or Mortimer, Tower at the south-east and emerging from Prison, or Debtors', Tower at the north-east.

While not exactly twin towers, those two are alike in many details. Their bold projection from the curtain wall may evoke remembrance of the earlier Caerphilly. Each has a round dungeon lit by narrow slits and entered originally by a trap door from the room above. Chambers in the two upper storeys are irregularly shaped and are approached by stairs in the thickness of the walls. At the top of the stairs can be seen privies, discharging into pits formed in the outer ward. The parapets and roofs were gained by outside stairs from wall walks on the curtain, which also led directly to the upper rooms of the gatehouse.

Weathercock, or Bronwen, Tower at the south-west and Chapel, or Armourers', Tower at the north-west differ in plan from the eastern pair because, as explained, they belong to a later instalment of the building pattern. They have newel stairs rising through their full height of three storeys to terminate in round turrets. Their rooms are five-sided and of uniform size. Windows, though with only single lights, are fairly large

and, as they face seaward high above steep slopes of rock, should have been quite secure. One cannot get into these towers from the wall walk.

Having examined these four sombre sentinels, we may pass into the outer ward, where there is not much to exercise the detective instinct. Low walls and ramparts on all sides closely surround the curtain wall; they were embattled, as traces of arrow slits in parapets reveal. Here we meet the principle of concentric defence, for archers could have fired from both circuits of walls simultaneously. This ward was obstructed on the south by a cross-wall with postern, near the spot now occupied by a turret; on the north, opposite the postern between chapel and bakehouse, was a gateway flanked by rounded towers.

The defences of Harlech were augmented in 1295 and following years when fortification was applied to almost the entire precipitous crag to north and west of the castle. This large area was bounded by an embattled wall with loopholes, which starts at the north-east corner of the outer ward near Prison Tower and falls in a broad sweep to the water gate at the edge of the marsh, where Edward the First must have unloaded his seaborne supplies. Visitors now go on to the castle rock through a small wooden gate behind Chapel Tower, whence a grassy path descends to the upper gate on the south-west. This territory used to be known as the middle postern and was parted from the northern portion by a wing wall from Chapel Tower. In the slope of the rock rather below the castle stand two platforms of masonry that were "in times paste used to plant ordinnance uppon". The upper gate was guarded by a drawbridge with pit, and the way down to the water gate continues by a steep flight of cobbled steps and paving whose character varies between angles and curves to make the journey tiring. Scanty relics of the water gate suffice to indicate a fair-sized structure with drawbridge and upper storey.

"A focus of strife, the delight of the bard, the glory of the minstrel"—so A. G. Bradley characterized Harlech Castle. Thoughts induced by a long sojourn today will be of patriotism and music, turbulence and endurance. How could it better stand for the nature of those who for generations have peopled the valleys of North Wales leading to it?

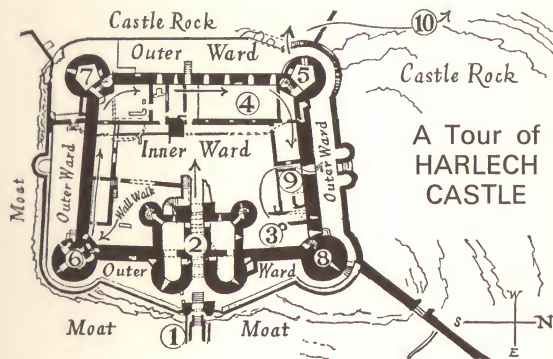
★ ★

Sheet music of the March of the Men of Harlech was published by Regina Music Publishing Company, of Leeds.

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From ticket office below Castle Green cross moat to outer gate(1); and through outer ward to enter gatehouse(2). In passage observe reconstruction drawing of castle about 1300; also some original vaulting, traces of portcullises, and drawbar grooves with "murder holes" above. Look back above entrance passage at barrel-vaulted chapel with lancet window, and above that at similar chapel with flat beamed ceiling. Having inspected ground-floor rooms (built as guardrooms and for stores), turn into left inner turret of gatehouse, find staircase at south-west corner, and mount 143 steps to top. Note conspicuous group of stone chimney stacks. Return to gate passage and pass into inner ward. Reach first floor of gatehouse by stairway, mostly a modern rebuilding. Against curtain walls on north, west, and south sides of ward lie fragments of domestic buildings (labelled), well and oven(3). Windows with seats in great hall(4). In north-west corner peep into basement of Chapel Tower(5). To reach wall walk, ascend Garden Tower(6) at south-east and proceed clockwise past Weathercock(7) and Chapel Towers to Prison Tower(8) at north-east. This last and Garden Tower each contained a dungeon formerly entered through trap door. Before coming down through Prison Tower, continue wall walk beyond it to squeeze on to platform above gatehouse. Enter outer ward through postern behind bake-house(9) on north curtain, and complete circuit between two lines of masonry. If energetic, descend from wooden gate behind Chapel Tower by grassy path to upper gate of way from the sea, then by cobbled steps and paving to see relics of water gate(10). Re-entry to castle is behind great hall; sole exit is by causeway over moat.

CASTELL HARLECH, SIR FEIRIONNYDD

Y mae'r amddiffynfa hon yn dangos fel y bu i hanes gwleidyddol Lloegr a hanes Cymru ymglymu wrth ei gilydd gan mai Edward I ac Owain Glyndwr yw'r ddau enw pwysig a gysylltir â'r castell hwn. Edward I a'i hadeiladodd yn ddolen yn ei gadwyn o amddiffynfeydd i godi ofn ar y Cymry ar ôl iddo drechu'r tywysogion Llywelyn a Dafydd ym 1282-83. Cipiodd Owain y castell ar ôl gwarchae ym 1404 a'i gadw am bedair blynedd. Yn ystod y cyfnod hwn Harlech oedd ei ganolfan ac efallai iddo gynnal senedd yn y castell.

Yn arferol cysylltir ymdaith Gwŷr Harlech â Rhyfel y Rhosynnau pan oedd Dafydd ap Ieuan yn amddiffyn y castell ar ran teulu Lancaster. Castell Harlech ym 1468 oedd yr olaf o gestyll Cymru a Lloegr i syrthio i ddwylo teulu York.

Bu gwarchae arno eto ym 1646-47, a bu'n rhaid i'r Cyrnol William Owen ildio i'r Pengryniaid a'r castell erbyn hynny'n falurion.

O dorri'r ffos i doi'r tyrau buwyd wrthi am chwe thymor, 1285-90, yn adeiladu'r castell. Cynlluniwyd tŷ porth hyfryd yn gartref i'r cwnstabl, a hwn yw'r nodwedd unigol amlycaf ymhob un o gestyll y brenin Edward I. Mae'n dangos y dull newydd o gryfhau'r amddiffynfa a gynlluniwyd gogyfer ag amddiffyn ymosodol ar y tu blaen yn hytrach na bod y fangre gryfaf o'r golwg. Yn y ward fewnol gwelir olion yr adeiladau lle trigai pobl, ac ar bob cornel y mae tŵr a llwybr, sydd mewn cyflwr da o hyd, yn rhedeg ar hyd y mur o un tŵr i'r llall. Y tu allan i'w furiau cyswllt (curtain walls) y mae'r ward allanol a'i rhagfuriau is yn ei gwahanu a chraig y castell. Oddi ar y ddau fur yma gallai'r saethyddion danio'r un pryd. Tua 1295 y dechreuwyd adeiladu'r mur sy'n amgylchynu'r graig.

Gynt deuai'r môr i fyny at waelod y clogwyn lle'r oedd porthladd cyfeus i'r llongau gariai gyflenwadau i'r castell.

